

Ballyhoo! Posters as Portraiture

A lesson plan compiled by the National Portrait Gallery

curriculum links

This lesson plan is suitable for students in grades 5-12 in American history and visual arts classes.

objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- determine the criteria that make a successful poster
- “read” the object to determine what is being communicated about the sitter in the poster.

posters

[\\$100,000 Reward \(John Wilkes Booth et. al\)](#)

[Edison’s Phonograph \(Thomas Edison\)](#)

[Folies-Bergère/ La Loïe Fuller \(Loïe Fuller\)](#)

[I Am Coming \(“Buffalo Bill” Cody\)](#)

[“above and beyond the call of duty” \(Dorie Miller\)](#)

[I Want You/ FDR \(Franklin D. Roosevelt\)](#)

[Yankee Doodle Dandy \(James Cagney\)](#)

[I don’t know what will happen now \(Martin Luther King, Jr.\)](#)

[Dylan \(Bob Dylan\)](#)

[We Are Still Here \(Leonard Crow Dog\)](#)

For more posters, see the online exhibition for “Ballyhoo! Posters as Portraiture” at:

<http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/ballyhoo/>

key words

Ballyhoo: A clamorous and vigorous attempt to win customers or advance any cause; blatant advertising or publicity; clamor or outcry; noisy shouting or uproar

Sitter: The subject of a portrait

Symbol: A form, image, or subject representing a meaning other than the one with which it is usually associated

materials

22 x 28-inch poster-size paper

Stamps

Stencils

Marker

duration

Two hours

activities

Part I: Discuss Posters as Portraiture

Introductory questions:

- The poster is a familiar part of our world. What is its role?
 - propaganda, promotion, announcement, or advertisement
- How do you characterize a poster?
 - a historical document, an inexpensive decorative item, a symbol, or an ephemeral piece of commerce?
- What are the criteria that make a successful poster? How does an artist create an image that can stop us in our tracks?

Have students work in groups or individually. They should complete the Pictorial Poster Analysis Worksheet (found at the end of this lesson) for one of the portraits. When they are finished, have them present their findings to their peers.

Alternatively, teacher and students may talk about the posters together. Questions to be considered are below.

Often a poster features a famous face. When it does, it is conveying information about that individual, while at the same time serving another purpose—announcing the arrival of a circus, hawking a product, building wartime morale, or promoting a movie or political movement.

- a. What symbols in the poster give us clues about the life of the sitter?
- b. What is being communicated about the sitter in this poster?
- c. Does the poster reinforce the sitter's public image? Undermine it? Subtly transform it? (for high school students)
- d. How does the poster express a specific moment in the life of the person depicted?

Part II: Create a Poster

1. Brainstorm with the class: What are different types of posters that you have seen? (examples include posters for movies, plays, sports events, concerts, albums, fundraising, campaigns, propaganda, wanted criminals, advertising, retail)
2. Divide students into groups. Have each group create its own poster, based on the list in #1. The poster should be relevant to students' own lives.
3. As time permits, have students share and discuss their posters.

Guidelines for Poster

- Decide with your group both the poster's purpose and audience. The poster should be relevant to your life and to your school, community, etc.
- Think about how to make your poster compelling and visually appealing.
- Use the materials provided to create your poster. Your poster should include the following:
 - ❖ Bright colors
 - ❖ A slogan
 - ❖ An image of at least one person

Pictorial Poster Analysis Worksheet

Before analyzing a poster or posters, first brainstorm in the space below to determine what you consider are the criteria that make a successful poster.

What are the main colors used in the poster?

Who is depicted in the poster?

What is the poster's purpose?

What symbols (if any) are used in the poster? Describe the symbols and their meanings.

Are the messages in the poster primarily visual, verbal, or both? Explain.

Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?

Is this a successful poster, based on your above criteria? Why or why not?